

The biggest loser of the presidential debate? The childcare crisis

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Excerpts

When moderator Jake Tapper asked President Joe Biden and former President Donald Trump about the childcare crisis during last night's presidential debate, my ears perked up. As Tapper pointed out, the average cost of childcare now tops \$11,000 a year, and for two children, it's more than what families pay in rent. So, he posed the question: "In your second term, what would you do to make childcare more affordable?"

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Finally, at the end of his response, after criticizing Trump for doing "virtually nothing" for childcare, Biden spent two sentences proposing that the US should increase the childcare tax credit and encourage businesses to have childcare facilities.

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Rather than spending so much time insulting each other, the pair — and the American people — would have gotten far more out of them actually discussing the issue of childcare in earnest. Last year, the progressive think tank The Century Foundation found that a whopping 70 percent of respondents would be more likely to support a candidate who wanted to expand childcare options for families. And even though something like a \$10-a-day program might sound radical, most Americans are here for it: In March, Cornell University's ILR Buffalo Co-Lab found that 79 percent of New Yorkers surveyed from all political backgrounds even supported making childcare a free service just like K-12 public schools.

Although parents of young children and those looking to start their families are obviously most affected by this issue, the whole economy suffers when it gets ignored. In Cornell's research, 42 percent of survey respondents with kids said one of the adults in the family had stopped working solely because they couldn't find or afford childcare. That's a ton of people leaving the workforce because of this problem. Yet our politicians are too busy slinging insults to do something about it.

Also in Cornell's analysis: investing \$1 billion into childcare could lead to \$1.8 billion in increased economic activity. I know many Americans who would take that ROI.

The childcare crisis is only getting worse, thanks to the end of pandemic-era federal funding that supported 220,000 daycare centers across the country. Eleven states and Washington DC have stepped in with their own funding to make up some of the difference. But in other states, the number of households with children under 12 that lack childcare has already increased by 5.3 percentage points since the funding ended last September, according to a May report from the National Women's Law Center.

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